Abbreviations

Abbreviations are shortened forms of words; acronyms are abbreviations formed by using the first letter of each word to form a pronounceable word. Contractions are also abbreviations formed by using an apostrophe to show omitted letters or numbers. (Contractions are used only in informal writing.) Use an abbreviation only if its meaning is clear.

Rule #1:

When introducing an abbreviation for the first time, place it in parentheses after the spelled-out term. Thereafter, the abbreviation may be used alone.

Example of Rule #1:

The California State University, Chico (CSUC) graduation ceremony will be held this Saturday. CSUC will graduate 2,700 students this year.

Rule #2:

Abbreviate commonly-known terms.

Examples of Rule #2:

PC
TV
ATM

Rule #3:

Abbreviate courtesy titles and personal titles. Abbreviate academic and professional titles only when they follow a name or when they are used with the full name or initials and the last name. Use a comma before and after an abbreviation in a sentence, except with the abbreviations Jr. and Sr.

Examples of Rule #3:

Mr.
Ms
Dr.
Laura Thomas, MD
Professor Soliz
Prof. Jorge Soliz
Prof. J.R. Soliz
Nancy Wright, RN, was promoted to head nurse.
Roger Palmer Sr. led the project.

Rule #4:

Abbreviations are acceptable for well-known businesses and organizations.
Examples of Rule #4:

FBI
AFL–CIO
CBS

Rule #5:

Use the abbreviations BC and AD, without periods, to indicate dates. BC always follows the year, but AD may follow or precede the year.

Examples of Rule #5:

400 BC
400 AD
AD 400

Rule #6:

Abbreviate months and days of the week only when they are part of a full date or in a chart where space is limited.

Examples of Rule #6:

December 16
Dec. 16, 1963
Monday, December 16
Mon. Dec. 16, 1963

Rule #7:

Use abbreviations for clock time. Use capital letters and periods, capital letters and no periods, or lowercase letters and periods. Just be consistent. DO NOT abbreviate clock time when no number is attached to the abbreviation.

Examples of Rule #7:

7:30 A.M.
7:30 AM
7:30 a.m.

Correct: The meeting is in the morning.
Incorrect: The meeting is in the a.m.

Rule #8:

Use abbreviations, without periods, for time zones.

Examples of Rule #8:

EST
MST
PDT
Rule #9:

Measurements should be spelled out, not abbreviated, except in tables and charts.

Examples of Rule #9:

Correct: inches
Incorrect: in.

Correct: miles per hour
Incorrect: mph

Rule #10:

The word number may be abbreviated when it is followed by a figure; otherwise, spell it out.

Examples of Rule #10:

No. 65
The number I want is 65.

Rule #11:

Use abbreviations for U.S. state names on envelopes and in the inside address of a letter. Generally, spell out the full state name in text. Street addresses can either be abbreviated or spelled out in text. When indicating direction before a street name, spell out North, South, East, and West. However, compound directions (N.W. or S.W.) after a street name may be abbreviated.

Example of Rule #11:

The meeting will be held at 1212 R Street, Sacramento, California.

Punctuation and capitalization

Rule #12:

Use periods in most abbreviations that contain lowercase letters. Do not use periods in most professional titles, the names of well–known businesses and organizations, and acronyms.

Examples of Rule #12:

f.o.b.  e.g.  p.m.
CPA  CLU  CFP
CBS  IBM  NRA

radar (radio detecting and ranging)
snafu (situation normal: all fouled up)
Rule #13:

When an abbreviation comes at the end of a sentence, use only one period. However, place question marks or exclamation marks after the period in the abbreviation.

Examples of Rule #13:

I awoke at 7:15 a.m.
Did you go to work at 8:00 a.m.?

Rule #14:

Generally, rules for capitalizing abbreviations follow the rules for capitalizing the original words. Proper nouns are capitalized in abbreviations; common nouns are not.

Examples of Rule #14:

NAACP
C.O.D.
FAA

Rule #15:

Use an apostrophe to show when letters of a word have been omitted in a contraction. DO NOT use the apostrophe when the abbreviation already shows omission of letters.

Examples of Rule #15:

aren't
cont. (NOT cont 'd)
Attn. (NOT Att'n)